

A photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon. Two dark, silhouetted islands or tree groups are visible in the middle ground, their forms reflected in the calm water. In the foreground, there is a dark, silhouetted line of reeds or grass. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.

Center for a Sustainable Coast

Programs and Activities

2002 Annual Report

November 2001 - October 2002

221 Mallory Street, Suite B Saint Simons Island, Georgia 31522

Coastal Management

The Georgia Coastal Management Program holds great promise for improving the availability and use of vital information needed to make wise decisions about the use and conservation of coastal resources. Bolstered by the support of federal funding and a comprehensive guiding document, with sufficient public involvement, this program could substantially strengthen environmental safeguards. We are working in collaboration with other groups to help accomplish this goal.

❖ Coastal Stewardship

As an active member of the Coastal Advisory Council, the Georgia Environmental Council, the Savannah Harbor Expansion Stakeholder Evaluation Group, the Glynn County Water Resources Management Advisory Committee, and the Coastal Georgia Greenway Steering Committee, Center staff is promoting stewardship of our natural resources by raising public awareness about vital ecosystem functions, their value to human communities, and their importance to existing and future nature-based businesses and jobs.

❖ Coastal Advisory Council

Met with members of the Coastal Advisory Council and staff of the Coastal Resources Division (DNR) to discuss how the program's Coastal Advisory Council (CAC) could become more effective and what their role might be. We proposed steps and criteria for strengthening the program through active council participation.

Center staff presented recommendations of the Coastal Advisory Council Steering Committee at an annual meeting for the Council hosted by the Coastal Resources Division of DNR. The Center played a leading role in shaping the future functions of the Council, which will unquestionably enhance the program's effectiveness.

Water Resources

Water quality and flow of water in coastal rivers is essential to the coastal environment. The region's quality of life and economy depend fundamentally on the interrelated systems of rivers, estuaries, freshwater wetlands, tidal marshes, and groundwater. With continuing growth throughout the region's five watersheds, there are numerous threats to coastal fisheries, water supply, and ecosystems. The Center is working with its members, other non-profit groups, and public officials to help improve understanding of issues, analysis of conditions, and regulatory protection of water resources.



❖ Water Quality Petition

The Center's original petition on water quality, signed by scores of coastal Georgians, was submitted to the Board of Natural Resources, along with a memo outlining suggestions to improve water protection. The Center received a written staff response from EPD, and we made additional policy suggestions in reply.

❖ Georgia Water Policy Coalition

Joined the newly created Georgia Water Policy Coalition, a network of 17 environmental groups, and participated in a series of meetings in developing a comprehensive state legislative water policy proposal for consideration by the Governor and General Assembly. Efforts are intended to ensure protection of water as a public resource.

❖ Spoke to DNR Board on Water

We joined a coalition of groups speaking in opposition to a water withdrawal permit for the Lower Floridan aquifer in Richmond Hill, pending the findings of state-funded environmental research already underway.

❖ Savannah Harbor Deepening

Continued working with representatives of harbor project stakeholders to carefully evaluate all aspects of proposed harbor expansion. Advocated use of peer review to ensure objectivity of stakeholder findings.

❖ Water Resource Protection

- Testified at EPD public hearings in Richmond Hill to oppose city's use of the Lower Floridan Aquifer due to risks of further contamination of the Upper Floridan Aquifer, the region's most important water supply source.

- Commented extensively on a report of the Coastal Marsh Hammock Advisory Committee and presented major points in two public hearings held by Coastal Resources Division of Georgia DNR.

❖ Legal Decision

Supporting Center's Action

As a result of a legal action filed on behalf of the Center and four other groups by the Southern Environmental Law Center, a judge revoked a Marshlands Protection permit for developing a one-acre site along the MacKay River in Glynn County. The project would endanger water quality, wildlife habitat, and public safety.

❖ Media Coverage on Water Issues

Three coastal newspapers covered the Center's positions on issues raised in our water quality petition (*The Camden County Tribune*, *The Savannah Morning News*, and *The Brunswick News*). Articles helped raise public awareness about critical resource protection problems and need for improved public policies. Georgia Public Radio coverage raised further public awareness of Center efforts.

Environmental Education & Values

*To achieve significant progress toward ways of living that are more compatible with our natural environment, we must raise awareness about the consequences of our actions – as consumers, workers, and residents. If future generations of coastal Georgians are to enjoy the region's rich diversity of fish, wildlife, and natural landscapes, we must align economic and political motives with those of public interest to realize a sustainable coast. This can only be accomplished through education, and through this education, reconsideration of our basic values. In our newsletter, **Works in Progress**, our website, editorials, commentary, and public presentations, the Center strives to inform and educate our members, elected officials, landowners, and many others whose actions affect this region's future.*

❖ Publications

- Working with Georgia Southern University, we published the Citizen's Guide to Development in Coastal Georgia, a handbook that will help prevent unintentional violation of state and federal environmental laws by acquainting the public with regulatory requirements for land development.
- The Center's policy recommendations for improving resource protection appeared in the widely circulated 2002 Georgia Environmental Briefing Book, published by the Georgia League of Conservation Voters Education Fund.

❖ Land Use Planning & Education

- Sent memo on development issues and related reference materials to 65 coastal elected officials, chamber of commerce presidents, and development authority directors. Purpose was to explain research evaluating the costs of Georgia development and reducing non-point source pollution using low-impact storm water controls.
- Published comments in local paper supporting use of Brunswick city docks for traditional shrimping operations, objecting to proposed commercial fishing prohibition to accommodate cruise ships.

❖ Environmental Education & Public Involvement

We also make numerous presentations to local civic groups, professional societies and students about coastal environmental

issues, development trends, and policy changes needed to reduce environmental risks. The Center's website and newsletter are used to enhance the environmental awareness of our members and many other environmentally concerned citizens, and to assist them in taking effective, timely actions. (We distribute more than 1,300 copies of our newsletter).

❖ Environmental Valuation

In partnership with several other co-sponsors, we outlined and agenda in proposing a forum on methods used to estimate the value of environmental resources and functions. The event is planned for 2003.

Land Use & Development

Land use and development are inevitable as the coastal population continues to grow. Disturbance of natural landscapes, wildlife habitats, and historic communities can permanently alter the visual and environmental quality that makes this region so appealing. Not all development is equally desirable or destructive. Decisions about how, when, and where to develop can greatly influence the degree to which coastal growth complements or contradicts the public's interest. The Center provides guidance in advising decision-makers about the benefits and costs of alternative development choices.

❖ Coastal Growth & Development Policy

Published comments in four different newspapers discussing development issues raised in public debate about marsh hammock protection. Center advocated reassessment of the region's growth priorities, choices, and decision criteria, and a moratorium on hammock development until new policies are adopted.

❖ Land Use & Water Resource Protection

- The Center helped convince local officials to oppose a speculative project that would have unjustifiably disturbed wetlands and consume enormous quantities of water, while providing few jobs or other benefits.
- Analyzed a proposal for a power plant in Glynn County, then submitted written objections to the planning commission based on the project's excessive water use in relation to very limited local job benefit. The proposal would jeopardize local economic opportunities by using our water to sell electricity in other states.

❖ Media Coverage of Development Issues

In several local newspaper articles, Center staff explained environmental implications of the power plant proposal in Glynn County. We emphasized the importance of using natural resources to achieve maximum public benefit, avoiding activities that exploit local resources to profit outside speculators and investors.

❖ Hammock Research

Center intern Kimberly Stewart, a recent graduate of Georgia Southern University's masters program, conducted Internet research on the biological characteristics of marsh hammocks, their function and value, and how to protect them. The research was done in conjunction with work of The Georgia Conservancy under funding from The Sapelo Foundation supporting hammock protection.

Air Quality & Atmospheric Deposition

Cumulatively enormous amounts of toxic contaminants are released by coal-burning power plants. Those most likely to be affecting coastal Georgia are in Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee and upstate Georgia - at least two dozen plants are in question. The Center collaborates with other organizations in raising public awareness about the importance of these issues and actions that can be taken to address them.

- ❖ At a State Capitol press conference we supported a moratorium on permitting power plants

The event was organized by a coalition of organizations concerned about water supply and quality. Numerous power plants are being planned by companies seeking approval to consume huge quantities of Georgia water resources to sell electricity to users in other states, an unwarranted use of natural resources.

- ❖ Spoke to the Board of Natural Resources about mercury pollution

We advocated revoking the permits of obsolete coal-burning power plants, which cause coastal fish contamination and dangerous human health risks through mercury pollution. Later, at a public meeting in Savannah, Center staff testified to EPD about regional mercury pollution caused by nearby Plant Kraft.

- ❖ Worked with other groups on air quality issues

Collaborated with several statewide organizations to fight sources of mercury contamination and acid rain through progressive proposals to improve energy policy sent to the Governor's Energy Task Force and in advising members of Congress about federal energy bills.

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